A forecaster's perspective on Eton Dorney

22 August 2012 - Knowing what the weather will bring is an important factor in planning any outdoor event.

That's true for a wedding, or a camping trip but it's also true for something on an altogether bigger scale like the Olympic Games.

That's why Met Office forecasters were working alongside the Olympic Games organisers in London, Weymouth and Portland and at Eton Dorney.

All three locations presented different challenges for the forecasters who were viewing the weather in the context of spectator safety as well as how it would affect the different competitions. In London, rainfall and thunderstorm predictions were very important whereas for the sailors and rowers at Weymouth and Eton, wind was the key factor.

To help forecast the wind for the sailing events the Met Office developed a very high resolution computer forecast. This gave the forecasters guidance on expected wind speeds and direction at points just 300 metres apart over Weymouth Bay, every 30 minutes. This forecast was 20 times more detailed than the usual UK computer forecast run by the Met Office; in world terms, even that forecast is at the leading edge of weather science .

Alison Eadie, one of the Met Office team at Eton Dorney, gives her own personal perspective on work as an Olympic forecaster: "We were there for a week before competition actually started, with the lake open for training sessions. During the week of the rowing competition the winds became stronger giving some cross wind issues on the course. We worked really closely throughout with the organisers to help them complete all the races fairly and on time. On a few days there were thunderstorms developing nearby and lightning actually struck one of the huge camera towers one afternoon, thankfully after the competition had finished for the day."

As a weather forecaster, Alison and her colleagues were fortunate to get a very different perspective on an Olympic venue. She continued: "We were usually the first on site at 5am every day, when the lake was still and peaceful and you could watch the sunrise before the crowds arrived."

High resolution forecasting was just one area where we have extended our science and technology capability for the Olympic and Paralympic games. We also introduced daily air quality forecasts on our website for over 5,000 locations, increased wind and wave modelling for Weymouth and Portland and new weather observing technology to support our weather forecasts and modelling capability. These developments will form part of the Olympic legacy helping us to deliver increasing accuracy and detail in our weather forecasts well into the future.

Contact information

Met Office Press Office: **+44 (0)1392 886655**

E-mail: Press Office

Met Office Customer Centre: **01392 885680**

If you're outside the UK: **+44 1392 885680**

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